

SIGNIFICANCE OF VOTING BEHAVIOUR IN INDIA-A STUDY

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Abstract; Voting behavior is the way that different people tend to vote. It is studied so that political scientists, or more accurately political psychologists, can understand why certain people vote for different political parties and so that political parties can predict who might vote for them in the future, which helps them to plan the policies, communication and the people who might best represent them and persuade voters to vote for them at the next election. Voting is one of the most usually used terms in contemporary age of democratic politics. The ever increasing popularity of democratic theory and practices has even made this term a household name. In democratic systems, and their number is quite large and ever increasing, each adult citizen uses 'voting' as a means for expressing his approval or disapproval of governmental decisions, policies and programmes of various political parties and the qualities of the candidates who are engaged in the struggle to get the status of being the representatives of the people. The study of determinants of electoral behavior constitutes a very significant area of empirical investigation. Man is a rational creature in the philosophical sense of term; he is not so rational in the realms of his economic or political behaviour.

Key Words: Voting, Determinants, Voting Behaviour, Election, Constituency, empirical, investigation.

Introduction;

There are some factors which determine the behaviour of voters during election time. These are varies from personal attachment to socio, political and economic reasons. To interpret voting behaviour both political science and psychology expertise were necessary and therefore the field of political psychology emerged including electoral psychology. According to Sociologist Gordon Marshall: "The study of voting behaviour invariably focuses on the determinants of why people tend to vote in public elections as they do and how they arrive at the decisions they make". According to Political University Professor – Stephen Wasby (New York State University, Department of Political Science): "The Study of Voting Behaviour involves an analysis of individual psychological make-up and their relation to political action as well as institutional patterns, such as the communication process and their impact on elections".

What is Voting Behaviour?

Samuel S. Eldersveld in his article "Theory and Method in Voting Behaviour Research" writes: The term voting behaviour is not new. But it has been used of late to describe certain areas of study and types of political phenomena which previously had either not been conceived or were considered irrelevant. Voting behaviour is not confined to the examination of voting statistics, records and computation of electoral shifts and

swings. It also involves an analysis of individual psychological processes (perception, emotion, and motivation) and their relation to political action as well as of institutional patterns, such as the communication process and their impact on election. In the words of Plano and Riggs, "Voting Behaviour is a field of study concerned with the ways in which people tend to vote in public election and the reasons why they vote as they do." The term voting behaviour has recently been expended in meaning and is taken as one major and board area of study subsumed within the broader designation of political behaviour.

Significance of Voting Behaviour:

It helps in comprehending the • The scientific study of voting behaviour is significant for the following reasons:
It helps in examining the internalization of democracy as a value among the elites • process of political socialization
It enables to throw light as to • It emphasizes the real impact of the revolutionary ballot box • as well as masses. It helps to measure whether it is modern or primordial • how far the electoral politics continue or break with the past in the context of political development.

Voting Behaviour in India:

Determinants The behaviour of voter is influenced by several factors such as religion, caste, community, language, money, policy or ideology, purpose of the polls, extent of franchise, political wave etc. The political parties and groups make use of these variables for the sake of winning the battle of the ballot box. Despite making their professions for enlightened secularism, politicians can be found making appeals to the religious and communal sentiments of the people; they can also be found involved in exploiting the factors of language or money to achieve the purpose of emerging successful in the war of votes. Appeals are issued and canvassing campaigns conducted in the name of a particular policy or ideology for the same purpose. The interest of the voters and accordingly their behaviour at the time of voting is also influenced by the nature or purpose of the elections or the extent of the suffrage. The force of charisma has its own part to play whereby the voters are influenced by a slogan like Garibi Hatao, or a vote for a pair of bullocks is vote for Panditji and progress, or „Indira means India, India means Indira, or Indira means Dictatorship, My heart beats for India versus Rajiv means Bofors and the like. The roles of all these factors can be examined in the study of Indian electoral behaviour. There are several factors responsible for voting Behaviour in India.

1. Magnetism/ Charisma:

One important factor of voting behaviour is Magnetism/ Charisma. It means exceptional quality of a factor and override group elements leader that becomes a source of attraction and reverence for the people in large numbers; in an opposite sense, it also means a source of awe and terror that frightens the people in large numbers not to speak or dare to do anything against the wishes of the mighty leader. Fortunately, in our country, the constructive aspect of charisma has had its role at the time of election.

2. Caste: Caste continues to be a determinant of voting behaviors in India. It has deep roots in the society and constitutes an important basis of social relations at all levels. Despite the adoption of several provisions which prohibit action and discrimination on its basis, caste continues to be a determinant of political behaviors.

Politicization of caste and casteism in politics has been a well-known reality of the Indian political system. The political parties in India, without any exception, while formulating their policies, programmes and election strategies always keep in mind the caste factor. Caste is a factor in the selection of candidates for contesting an election from a constituency.

3. Religion: The establishment of a secular state in India by guaranteeing right to freedom of religion to everyone, treating every religion equal and non – recognition of any religion as a state religion – has not been successful in preventing the role of religion as determinant of political behaviour in general and voting behaviour in particular. The existence of such political parties and neo-political groups as stand linked with a particular religion, for example, Muslim League, Akali Dal, Hindu Maha Sabha, Shiv sena etc., have been one of the reasons behind the continued role of religion as a determinant of voting behaviour.

4. Language:

India is a multi-lingual state. Linguism also serves as factor in voting behaviour. The organization of states on linguistic basis fully reflects the importance of language as a factor of politics in India. There have been problems in states like that of status of one particular language in that state, or relating to the quality of the status of a language of a state. Since people have emotional attachment with their languages, they easily get influenced whenever there comes up any issue relating to language. Linguistic interests always influence voting behaviour.

5. Money Factor:

India is a poor country with a large number of people living below poverty line. Money as such plays a vital role in determining voting behaviour of the people in India. A rich candidate or party has always better chances of winning the elections. But it is to be pointed out here that it happens only in normal circumstances and not during a wave –election or when other key issues are involved. Despite organizing a very expensive election campaign, the Congress (I) lost power in 1989.

6. Sub-Nationalism:

Ethnic pluralism, communalism, regionalism and sub-nationalism are the hard realities of Indian society. Of late sub-nationalism has become a crucial factor in influencing the voting behaviour of the people. At times a secessionist group gives a call for the boycott of elections and uses pressure tactics to forces the voters either not to vote in favour of a particular party. Some regional political parties like some fractions of the Alkali Dal, Naga Nationalist Organization, Gorkha League, Jharkha party, AASU and AAGSP in Assam has raised parochial slogans from time to time and has disturbed the emotional stability of the people of their states. Such actions of some political parties have at times influenced some people to organize themselves on narrow and parochial lines.

7. Performance of the Party in Power:

Each Political party contests elections on the basis of an election manifesto, and after coming into power, it is expected to fulfil the promises made there in. Good or bad performance of the ruling party, just on the basis of the election promises made and promises actually fulfilled influence the basis behaviour of the people in a big way. We experienced it in 1989 in India, when the Congress (I), which got a thumping majority in 1984 election,

could not win even a simple majority in the very next election held in 1989 mainly because of its failure to perform successfully. In 1989, the Congress Party and in 1991 the Janata Dal failed to win because of their failures to exercise power and maintain their political stabilities. This has happened mainly because of a corresponding increase in the number of “floating voter” or “switchers” who are mostly young men and women from educated upper middle class, and are ready to shift their support from one party to another on the basis of their performance.

8. Mass literacy:

Mass literacy has been another factor of voting behaviours in India. It is because of this weakness of the people that political parties, communal groups and militant outfits, are in a position to exploit the sentiments of the people in the name of caste, religion, region and other such factor. The votes of the illiterate constitute a big proportion of the votes polled and hence it plays a big role in determining the outcomes of elections. However, despite this feature, the common sense and maturity born out of experience of the past has also been playing a big role in influence the voters mind and actions. In 1977 they united to defeat the forces authoritarianism and 1980; they again to defeat the united non performers.

9. Factionalism:

The Indian Political life, from the village level to the national level, is characterized by factionalism. Neither political party, nor even the cadre based BJP and the two communist parties are free from factionalism. It is at work, as Rajani Kothari points out, at all level of the congress. It has adversely affected the strength of the congress is a political party with glorious past, a weak present and not a bright future. Other parties are also suffering from factionalism.

10. Public Esteem of the Candidate:

A candidate report with the people with constituency or his known qualities or contribution in any value spread of activity always acts as a factor of voting behaviour. Apart from his parties' loyalty or opinion on various issue and problem, a voter while making his choice always takes into account the nature and level of his association with the candidate. A positive image of a party's candidate is a source of popular support for the party. A voter prefers to vote for a candidate who is approachable and who can help him anyway.

11. Election campaigns:

Each party launches a vigorous election campaign for influencing the voters in its favour. Use of such means as mass meetings, street meetings, personal contacts, posters, poster war, speeches by film stars, TV and Radio broadcasts, newspaper advertisement, hand bills, processions and propaganda, is made to win votes, particularly the floating votes. Election Campaign is designed to make a voter believe that his interest can be best served by the party, the candidate of the party contesting from his constituency. Poll eve-campaigning plays a role in influencing the choice of the voters.

Conclusion;

These are thus the important determinants of voting behaviour in India. The continuity in the operation of India's political system as a developing democratic political system is gradually training the Indian voters. The

process of emergence of an issue based political struggle in place of a caste or religion or personality dominated struggle for power is very slowly but gradually taking shape. Elections occupy a prominent place in the democratic government. It is a means through which people express and enforce their political opinion and regulate political organization of the society. However, the behaviour of a voter is influence by several factors such as religion, caste, community, language, money, policy or ideology, purpose of the polls, extent of franchise and the like political parties and groups make use of these variables for the sake of winning the battle of the ballot box. It is therefore, imperative that the use of these determinants should be avoided and elections should be conducted in a very free and fair manner. It also depends upon whether the system allows freedom of thought, expression and association to the people. Mere presence of an electoral system does not make a political system democratic. The will of people is expressed through voting in elections and therefore, all undemocratic and unfair means like manipulating and rigging need to be avoided in the elections. No such action is taken which would in any way undermine the popular will expressed through elections.

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